

Second Appendix to Catalogue of the
Verestchagin Exhibition.

REALISM.

BY

VASSILI VERESTCHAGIN.



The Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts,
OF
PHILADELPHIA.

1889.

*The Artist is indebted for the translation of this
pamphlet to the kindness of his friend,
MRS. MACGAHAN.*

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REALISM.



REALISM—realism!" How very often do we hear this term, and yet how seldom does it appear to be applied understandingly.

"What do you take realism to be?" I asked a well educated lady in Berlin, who had been talking a great deal about realism and the realists in art. The lady did not seem to be ready with an answer, since she could only reply that "A realist is he who represents subjects in a realistic manner."

I hold, though, that the art of representing subjects in a realistic manner does not entitle a person to the name of realist. And, in order to illustrate my meaning, I may present the following example:

When the war of the British with the Zulus came to an end, there could be found no man among the prominent English artists who would take upon himself the task of committing to canvas that epopee enacted between the whites and blacks, and so the English had to have recourse to a very talented

French artist. They gave him money, and explained to him that such and such were the uniforms and the arms of the English soldiers, and such and such were the clothing, or what represents clothing, among the Zulus. Then, eye-witnesses to the military encounters told the Frenchman of what consisted the background to the affair in each case, most likely supplementing their accounts with photographic views. Armed with this information the artist set to work, without having the least personal knowledge of the country he was going to reproduce, nor of the types, the peculiarities, or the customs of Zululand. With much assurance the artist went on with his task and turned out several lively pictures in which there are a great many men attacking an enemy—defending itself; a great number of dead and wounded; much blood; much gunpowder-smoke, and all that kind of thing, yet, with all this, there is total lack of the principal thing: there are no Britishers nor Zulus to be found in the pictures. Instead of the former we behold Frenchmen dressed up in British uniforms, and instead of Zulus, the ordinary Parisian negro-models, reproduced in various more or less warlike attitudes.

Well, is that realism? No.

Most artists, besides, do not take sufficient pains to reproduce the true light under which the events they treat have really taken place. Thus, such scenes as are taken up in the just mentioned pictures—scenes of battles under the intolerably torrid

sun of Africa, are being painted by the grayish light of European studios. Of course the sunlight, and the numerous peculiar effects dependent on it, cannot prove successful in such a case and the effect is lost.

Is that realism then? Certainly not.

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I go further, and assert that in cases where there exists but a bare representation of a fact or of an event without idea, without generalization, there can possibly be found some qualities of realistic execution, but of realism there would be none: of that intelligent realism, I mean, which is built on observation and on facts—in opposition to idealism, which is founded on impressions and affirmations, established *a priori*.

Now, can any one bring the reproach against me that there is no idea, no generalization in my works? Hardly.

Can anyone say that I am careless about the types, about the costumes, about the landscape of the scenes represented by me? That I don't study out beforehand the personages, the surroundings figuring in my works? Hardly so.

Can anyone say that, with me, any scene, taking place in reality in the broad sunlight, had been painted by studio light—that a scene, taking place under the frosty skies of the North, is reproduced in the warm inclosure of four walls? Hardly so.

Consequently, I can claim to be a representative

of realism, such realism as requires the most severe manipulating of all the details of creation, and which not only does not exclude an idea, but implies it.

That I am not alone in such an estimate of my work, is proved by the following lines, from a correspondent to an American paper,* sent from Paris at the time of the last exposition of my paintings in that city :

“The respect shown to certain pictured ideals—the ideals of a painter so foreign to Parisian conventions as Verestchagin—is noted as a pleasing indication of departure from the gross realism that was beginning to obtain in French art. Mr. Dargenty, of ‘*Courrier de l’Art*,’ does not consider Verestchagin as a ‘seducing’ painter, but concedes to him knowledge and talent, and declares that for his part he prefers the refinement of an idea to the ‘brutal expression of vulgar realism.’ He hopes for a reaction and believes that the crowd that ‘precipitated’ itself in the exposition of Mr. Verestchagin ‘heralded’ a running victory for the idea.”

Still more notable was the judgment of the London “*Christian*” of December 2d, 1887—a view having all the more interest to me because of the special character of the paper that published it :

“These paintings are the work of a Russian, Verestchagin, a painter equal to any of his contemporaries in artistic ability, and beyond any painter

* Sunday Express, Albany, 22 July, 1888.

who ever lived in the grandeur of his moral aims and the application of his lessons to the consciences of all who take the least pains to understand him.

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I will only say that he who misses seeing these paintings will miss the best opportunity he may ever have of understanding the age in which he lives; for if ever the nineteenth century has had a prophet, it is the Russian painter, Verestchagin."

I repeat it: I cite this last passage expressly in consideration of its character, as an opinion emitted by a specially religious organ, an opinion made all the more significant in view of the attacks to which I had been submitted by people striving to prove themselves greater papists than the Pope.

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Realism is not antagonistic to anything that is held dear by the contemporary man—it does not clash with common sense, with science, nor with religion. Can anyone have anything but the deepest reverence for the teachings of Christ concerning the Father and Creator of all that exists—to the golden rule of Christian charity?

It is true that we are enemies of bigotry, of all ostentatious, assumed piety; but who is it that can blame us for this since Christ himself has said:

"But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions as the heathen *do*; for they think they shall be heard for their much speaking." *

* St. Matthew, VI. : 7.

As can be easily conceived, we have a different estimation of many things that were being explained in another way some hundreds of years ago. The infancy of science and, consequently, of the entire conception of the universe can interest us now, but it can no more direct us; at the threshold of the twentieth century, we can no longer admit that the skies above are peopled by saints and by angels; that the interior of the earth is occupied by devils engaged in their task of roasting the sinners of the world. We refuse even to accept, in its literal sense, the ancient idea of rewards for good deeds and that of torments in slow fires, as punishment for evil deeds.

In our capacity of artists we don't deny the ideals of the past ages and of the ancient masters. On the contrary, we give them an honorable place in the history of art; but we refuse to imitate them for the very simple reason that everything is good in its own time, and that the realism of one century already bears in itself the germs of the idealism of the next.

The very same masters who are held to be great idealists in art—have not they been great realists in their own time?

Who would risk the assertion that Raphael was not a realist in the age in which he lived; that his works did not scandalize many of his contemporaries, whose tastes were formed on the forms of primitive masters?

And Rubens, who transgressed all limits of contemporary decency, and that, not only in his capacity of painter, but even as a thinker? I hope no one would be ready to question the fact that his powerful but one-sided genius has intermingled the types of the personalities of the Christian religion with those of the heathenish mythology; that his God the Father is the same as his Jupiter of Olympus; that they are portraits of the very same red-cheeked studio model; that his Virgin and his Hebe—one may even say his Venus—are all personalities of the same type, all alike red-cheeked, handsome and self-satisfied! Who would deny that Rubens, having peopled the Christian heavens with heavy, buxom, healthy and very immodest ladies and gentlemen, had reversed all traditions and thus had shown himself to be a talented, powerful realist in his time? Doubtlessly, he bewildered and scandalized a good many of his pious contemporaries.

And Rembrandt! and the rest of them, all of whom are now held to be idealists, more or less so: was not each one of them a representative of realism in his time, realism that has been considerably smoothed down in our days by the hand of time on one side and the onward march of our self-consciousness on the other?

Who would think nowadays of reproaching those painters for all that boldness, which certainly had proved astounding to their contemporaries? And yet how many were the disputes concerning those

painters, how many lances have been broken in their behalf! As we look back now all that seems strange to us. But is not all that a sign of what awaits the noted works of our own time? These also were received inimically, were proclaimed to be too far-reaching, too bold, too realistic, yet will not they also in their turn acquire lasting strength under the influence of onward marching thought and technics? Will not the day come when they will also find themselves, unawares, in the archives of old ideals?

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But we have to count with our irascible and exacting contemporaries. It is generally held to be unpardonable boldness — quite a scandalous proceeding in fact — to recede from formulas, recognized by successive generations, through centuries. Novelists, painters, sculptors, musicians, are all alike invited to make compromises with triviality and absurdity which invariably retard the development of the idea and of the technics.

Even such persons as grudgingly admit that we also are “men of thoughts,” that we also are “men of well developed technics,” even they express their regrets that we should prove false to the traditions of the old masters; that we should not follow the tenets consecrated by great names.

Yes, it is true: we differ in many ways; we think differently, we are bolder in our generalization of the facts of the past, the present and the future; we

even work differently and transfer our impressions in a different manner.

Can we take it now in its literal sense—the generally accepted conception of God, who had once assumed the form of Man, and is now sitting on the right hand of the Father Almighty, with all the hosts of saints and angels gathered around Him? Can we admit as facts the idea of all those thrones that surpass in richness the celebrated thrones of the Great Moguls of India? Can we admit now the idea of all those splendid vestments, adorned with embroidery, with pearls and precious stones and all that in the clouds? Can we sincerely and artlessly represent to ourselves the saints that are supposed to sit on those same clouds as on arm-chairs and sofas, likewise in the richest attire — saints who would be found thus amidst the luxurious surroundings that were so distasteful to them in their life on earth.

All those splendid garments, all those gilded surroundings, held out as everlasting rewards for virtue practiced on earth—don't they appear to us quite childish now, not to say wholly inconsistent with good taste?

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A good deal has been written about my works: many were the reproaches brought against my paintings, those treating of religious subjects as well as of military. And yet they were, all of them, painted without any preconceived idea,—were

painted only because their subjects interested me. The moral in each case appeared afterwards, coming up of its own account, from the very truthfulness of impressions.

Now, for instance, I have seen Emperor Alexander II. on five consecutive days, as he sat on a little knoll—the battle-field spreading out before him—watching, with field-glass in hand, first the bombardment, and then the storming of the enemy's positions. This, surely, was also the way in which the old German Emperor attended battles,—as well as his son, that admirable man, the late Frederick of Germany. Of this I have even been assured by eye-witnesses. Certainly, it would be ridiculous to suppose that an Emperor assisting at battles would canter about brandishing his sword as a young ensign, and yet the desire has been attributed to me to undermine by my picture the prestige of the sovereign in the eyes of the masses, who are prone to imagine their Emperor prancing on a fiery steed, in times of danger, in the very thick of the fight.

I have represented the bandaging and the transporting of the wounded exactly as I have seen it done and have felt it in my own person when wounded, bandaged and transported in the most primitive manner. And yet, that again has been declared to be a gross exaggeration, a calumny.

I observed during several days how prisoners were slowly freezing to death on a road extending over thirty miles. I called the attention of the

American artist, Frank D. Millet, who was on the spot, to that scene; and when he afterwards saw my painting he declared it to be strikingly correct; yet for that painting I have been treated to such abuse as would not admit of repetition in print.

I have seen a priest performing the last religious rites on a battle-field over a mass of killed, plundered, mutilated soldiers, who had just given up their life in the defense of their country; and that scene again—a picture which I had painted, literally, with tears in my eyes—has been also proclaimed in high quarters to be the product of my imagination, a downright falsehood.

My lofty accusers did not deign to pay any attention to the fact that the lie was given them by that same priest who, disgusted with the accusations against me, declared—and that in the presence of the public standing before the picture—that it was he who had been performing those last rites over the massed bodies of the killed soldiers—had done it in the very surroundings reproduced in my picture. Yet, notwithstanding all this, my picture barely escaped being ejected from the exposition, and when afterwards it was intended to publish all those pictures in colored prints, the officials put their veto on the scheme, for fear that those cheap prints should find their way among the masses.

It should not be imagined, however, that that indignation prevailed exclusively in Russian high spheres. It was a very well known Prussian gen-

eral who advised Emperor Alexander II. to have all my military paintings burned, as objects of a most pernicious kind.

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There were still more inimical commentaries on those of my pictures which treat of religious subjects. Yet have I attacked the Christian morals? No—I hold these very highly. Have I attacked the idea of Christianity or its founder? No—I have the highest respect for them. Have I tried to detract from the significance of the Cross? No—this would be a sheer impossibility.

I have traveled all over the Holy Land with the book of the Gospels in my hand ; I have visited all the places sanctified, centuries ago, by the presence of our Saviour in them. Consequently, I must have, and do have, my own ideas and conceptions as to the representation of many events and facts recorded in the Gospels. My ideas necessarily differ from the conceptions of artists who have never seen the scenery of the Holy Land, have not personally observed its population and their customs.

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Here is my idea, for instance, of the fact of the adoration of the Magi ; a painting contemplated, but not yet executed.

A clear, starry night ; travelers are approaching Bethlehem—those are the Magi, men versed in science, having a knowledge of astrology. Proceeding on their way toward the city, the wise men

notice a star standing over it—a star which they never yet had observed. Since, at that time, the idea was prevalent that every man had his own star; and, *vice versa*, every star corresponded to some man on earth, so the Magi naturally conclude that this new star indicates the birth of a child somewhere in the neighborhood, and that—the star being exceptionally brilliant—the new-born child must develop into a most prominent man.

Arriving at Bethlehem, the Magi put up at an inn. Soon after, the servant, who had been attending to the travelers' mules, comes in and tells the Magi that a poor woman had sought refuge in the place where their animals were kept, and there had given birth to a most beautiful child. Hearing this, the Magi exchange significant glances—the coming up of the star has been rightly interpreted by them.

“Let us go and see; it must be an extraordinary child,” they say, and thereupon proceed to the grotto of the inn, where the horses, the cows and the donkeys were kept, being followed by a few other travelers, who are likewise curious to see the new-born child.

In a corner of the grotto they observe a beautiful, pale young woman, sitting on a pile of straw and nursing her baby, whilst her husband, an elderly man, is seen in the distance, outside the grotto, preparing something for his family.

“What a beautiful child!” exclaimed the Magi, and turning to the Virgin, say: “Remember our

words, He will be a great man; we have seen His star."

Then, their pity being stirred by the poverty of the surroundings, one of the wise men would offer a gold coin as a gift to the child, while another would, perhaps, pour out a little of the precious myrrh from his traveling-flask. As the wise men get ready to leave the grotto, they turn once more to Mary and repeat their prediction concerning the great future of the child, and "Mary kept these things and pondered them in her heart."

I firmly believe that such a realistic representation of the poverty and simplicity attending the nativity of Christ is incomparably loftier than the idealization of richness and other exaggerations to which old masters had recourse. But such a treatment of the subject is new; therefore it appears strange, and very likely will excite comment. And only in a century or two our descendants will be able to decide which of these two opposing views was the correct one.

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Among the paintings on exhibition will be noticed one portraying a not infrequent event in Palestine in the olden time—an event highly dramatic yet retaining all its simplicity. I mean "A crucifixion under the Romans."

The sky is overcast by heavy black clouds. Just outside the walls of Jerusalem, on a small rock, are erected three crosses, all of the same size, shape

and appearance. The figures of the crucified on the two sides are of a vulgar type and of coarse build, while the central figure is of a more refined form. His face is not seen; it is hid by long auburn hair that hangs over it; long hair indicates that the crucified was a man who dedicated himself to God. The wounds on the hands and feet of the three crucified men bleed profusely (it being a well-known fact that physicians find it difficult to stop the flow of blood out of outstretched palms and feet). In front of the crosses stand two priests of high rank, and they seemingly argue about some matter, as if trying to prove something to a Roman in military attire: possibly they refer to the guilt of the man crucified on the middle cross, a guilt about which the military man seemed to retain some doubts. Around the rock soldiers are forming a chain to restrain the crowd.

In the foreground of the painting are seen people of every description; some on foot, some on horseback; others mounted on camels or on donkeys. Those are country folks or nomads, who, returning home from market, stopped over on their way for a moment in order to witness the event of the day—the execution of a man, the renown of whose deeds had reached even their huts and tents—a man whose arrest caused almost an insurrection in the city. Among others in the crowd can be noticed a few Hebrew merchants with their characteristic head-gear (which was discarded at a comparatively late

date), and Pharisees with the letters of the Law written on the coverings of their heads. One of the Pharisees is discussing something with his neighbor concerning a woman who is seen weeping bitterly, in the corner of the picture, presumably the mother of one of the crucified men. Her face cannot be seen, but her sorrow must be great indeed, and none of the women surrounding her seem likely to be able to console her. Many a time, probably, had she tried to avert her son from his chosen course, but all in vain, and now his time has come.

By the side of the heart-broken mother stands a handsome young woman plunged into deep consternation at the sight of the executed man; the tears run down her cheek, but she is not conscious of it, so thoroughly absorbed is she by her terrible, unspeakable grief.

As soon as the authorities would retire and the crowd thin out, there would be a chance for the mother, and those that surround her, to approach the crosses; then they would find it possible to say their last farewell. . . .

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Further on, we have a representation of a contemporary execution, among other people and surroundings. Here we see a cold winter day in the North. A mass of people is crowding on one of the squares of St. Petersburg, pressing toward the gallows and being held back by mounted gendarmes. Close to the gallows are admitted but the chosen ones,

mostly the military, all representatives of the gilded youth of the city, who are in hopes of getting a piece of the cord used by the hangman : the superstition being very common that a piece of the cord on which a man was hung is sure to bring luck at cards to its fortunate possessor.

The criminal, enveloped in a white shroud with the cap drawn over his head, has just been hung and is yet whirling round on the cord, while the people stand in mute bewilderment before the instructive sight. There is but a single hoarse voice elevated from among the crowd : " There now—serves them right, too ! " But these words are immediately hushed by several women's voices crying out, " What are you saying ? It is beyond us to condemn him now. Let God Almighty pass judgment on him ! "

Meantime the snow continues to fall, the smoke is rising from the factories, the work is going on as usual.

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It is worthy of notice that this last painting, while it did not please Russians, pleased the English people very much indeed ; on the other side, the " Blowing from guns in India " is not at all liked by Englishmen, and yet the Russians fancied it very much. Men who had seen much service in India assured me that I was mistaken in presenting such an execution as a typical, characteristic way of capital punishment in that country ; they insisted

that this mode of execution had been adopted but once—in the course of the last insurrection of the Sepoys—and even at that time it had been used but in a very few instances. But I maintain that this mode of execution—a comparatively humane one too—not only has been in constant use during the revolt referred to, when the Sepoys were blown from guns by the thousand, but that it was used by the British authorities in India for many years before and after the Sepoy revolt of 1858. More than that, I am quite positive that that particular mode of execution will have to be used in future times. The Hindoo does not fear any other kind of capital punishment received at the hands of the “heathenish, unclean Europeans.” They hold that any one shot down or hung by the European goes to swell the ranks of the martyrs who are entitled to a high reward in the future life. But an execution by means of a gun carries positive terror into the heart of a native, since such a shot tears the criminal’s body in many parts and thus prevents him from presenting himself in decent form in heaven. This bugbear was used by the British, and will be used by them as long as they fear to lose their Indian possessions.

In order to hold a population of 250,000,000 in political and economical submission by means of 60,000 bayonets, it is not enough to be brave and to be possessed of political tact—punishment and bloody reprisals cannot be avoided.

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All this is so self-evident, that it seems really wonderful that, while we artists are required to observe and discriminate, people are still inclined to be astonished and indignant whenever we put those faculties of ours to use and transfer our impressions to canvas or paper.

The artists are on all hands pressed to give the public something new, something original, something that is not hackneyed by fashion and triviality; yet, when we make an effort to present something of the sort, we are accused of insolence.

And what are the results of such a state of things?

People get tired of books and gorge themselves on crude facts from real life as recorded in daily newspapers; people get tired of picture galleries and expositions, being certain to find in most of them the very same kind of pictures—all treating of the very same subjects, painted in an identical manner; people find it a dull task to go to the theaters where in nine plays out of ten they will find the very same conventional plot, invariably terminating in a wedding.

Well, what is now the part of art generally speaking?

Why, art is brought down to the level of a toy for such as can and like to be amused by it; it is expected, as it were, to stimulate the public's digestive powers. Paintings, for instance, are considered simply as furniture: if there happens to remain an

empty space on the wall between the door and the corner taken up, let us say, by a What-Not surmounted by a vase—why then, that empty space is forthwith covered by a picture of light contents and of pleasant execution; such a one as would not detract too much attention from the other furniture and bric-à-brac, would not interfere with the *dolce far niente* of visitors.

And yet the influence and the resources of art are enormous. The majority of old-time painters were handicapped by their allegiance to power and riches; they were men who were not weighed down by any sense of serious civil responsibility, and yet, notwithstanding this, how powerful was the influence of art during whole centuries. It was felt in all the corners and hidden recesses of the life of the nations!

What then is not to be expected from art in our time, when artists are inspired with their duties as citizens of their country—when they cease to dance attendance on the rich and powerful, who love to be called patrons of art—when artists have acquired independence and have begun to realize that the first condition of a fruitful activity is to be a gentleman, not in its narrow meaning of caste, but in the wide acceptance of the term pertaining to the time we live in.

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Armed with the confidence of the public, art will adhere more closely to society, will constitute itself its ally in the face of the serious danger that threat-

ens society nowadays—that kind of society which we all know, which we are all more or less prompted to love and to respect.

There is no gainsaying the fact that all the other questions of our time are paling before the question of socialism that advances on us, threateningly, like a tremendous thunder cloud.

The masses that have been for centuries leading a life of expectancy while hanging on the very borders of starvation, are willing to wait no more. Their former hopes in the future are discarded; their appetites are whetted and they are clamoring for arrears, which means now the division of all the riches, and so as to make the division more lasting, they are claiming that talents and capacities should be levelled down to one standard, all workers of progress and comfort alike drawing the same pay. They are striving to reconstruct society on new foundations, and in case of opposition to their aims, they threaten to apply the torch to all the monuments pertaining to an order that, according to them, has already outlived its usefulness; they threaten to blow up the public buildings, the churches, the art galleries, libraries and museums—a downright religion of despair!

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II.

My friend, the late General Skobeleff, once asked me, "How do you understand the movement of the

socialists and the anarchists." He owned to it that he, himself, did not understand at all what they aimed at. "What do they want? What are they striving to attain?"

"First of all," I answered, "those people object to wars between nations; again, their appreciation of art is very limited, the art of painting not excluded. Thus, if they ever come into power, you, with your strategic combinations, and I, with my pictures, will both be shelved immediately. Do you understand this?"

"Yes, I understand this," rejoined Skobelev, "and from this on I am determined to fight them."

There is no mistaking the fact that, as I have said before, society is seriously threatened at the hands of a large mass of people counting hundreds of millions. Those are the people, who, for generations, during entire centuries, have been on the brink of starvation, poorly clad, living in filthy and unhealthy quarters; paupers, and such people as have scarcely any property, or no property at all. Well, who is it that is to blame for their poverty—are not they themselves to be blamed for it?

No, it would be unjust to lay all the blame at their door; it is more likely that society at large is more to blame for their condition than they are themselves.

Is there any way out of the situation?

Certainly there is. Christ, our Great Teacher,

has long ago pointed out the way in which the rich and the powerful could remedy the situation without bringing things to a revolutionary pass, without any upheaval of the existing social order, if they would only seriously take care of the miserable ; that certainly would have insured them the undisturbed enjoyment of the bulk of their fortune. But there is little hope of a peaceful solution of the question now ; it is certain that the well-to-do classes will still prefer to remain Christians in name only ; they will still hope that palliative measures will be sufficient to remedy the situation ; or else, believing the danger to be distant yet, they will not be disposed to give up much ; while the paupers—though formerly they were ready for a compromise—may be soon found unwilling to take the pittance offered them.

What do they want, then ?

Nothing less than the equalization of riches in the society to come ; they claim the material as well as moral equalization of all rights, trades, all capacities and talents ; as we have already said, they strive to undermine all the foundations of the existing state of society, and, in inaugurating a new order of things they claim to be able to open a real era of liberty, equality and fraternity, instead of the shadows of those lofty things, as existing now.

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I do not mean to go into the discussion of the matter ; I would not pretend to point out how much

justice or injustice, how much soundness or unsoundness there is in these claims; I state only the fact that there is a deep gulf between the former cries for bread and the sharply formulated claims of the present. It is evident that the appetite of the masses has grown within the past centuries, and the bill which they intend to present for payment will not be a small one.

Who will be required to pay this bill?

Society, most certainly.

Will it be done willingly?

Evidently not.

Consequently there will be complications, quarrels, civil wars.

Certainly there will be serious complications; they are already casting their shadows before them in the shape of disturbances of a socialistic character that are originating here and there. In America, most likely, those disturbances are lesser and less pointed, but in Europe, in France and Belgium, for instance, such disorders assume a very threatening aspect.

Who is likely to be victorious in this struggle?

Unless Napoleon I. was wrong in his assertion that victory will always remain with the *gros bataillons*, the "regulators" will win. Their numbers will be very great; whoever knows human nature will understand that all such as have not much to lose will, at the decisive moment, join the claims of those who have nothing to lose.

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It is generally supposed that the danger is not so imminent yet ; but, as far as I was able to judge, the impendence of the danger varies in different countries. France, for instance—that long-suffering country which is forever experimenting on herself, whether it be in social or scientific questions, or in politics—is the nearest to a crisis ; then follow Belgium and other countries.

It is very possible that even the present generation will witness something serious in that respect. As to the coming generations, there is no doubt that they will assist at a thorough reconstruction of the social structure in all countries.

The claims of socialists, and, particularly, the anarchists, as well as the disorders incited by them generally produce a great sensation in society. But no sooner are the disorders suppressed, than society relapses again into its usual unconcern, and no one gives a thought to the fact that the frequency of those painful symptoms, recurring with so much persistency, is in itself a sign of disease.

Far-seeing people begin to realize that palliative measures are of no more use ; that a change of governments and of rulers will not avail any more ; and that nothing is left but to await developments contingent on the attitude of the opposed parties—the energetic determination of the well-to-do classes, not to yield, and that of the proletaires, to keep their courage and persevere.

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The only consolation remaining to the rich consists in the fact that the "regulators" have not had time yet to organize their forces for a successful struggle with society. This is true to a certain extent. But, though they do it slowly, the "regulators" are perfecting their organization all the time: yet, on the other hand, can we say that society is well enough organized not to stand in dread of attacks?

Who are the recognized and official defenders of society?

The Army and the Church.

A soldier, there is no doubt of it, is a good support, he represents a solid defense; the only trouble about him is that the soldier himself begins to get weary of his ungrateful part. It is likely that for many years to come yet the soldier will shoot with a light heart at such as are called his "enemies"; but the time is not far distant when he will refuse to shoot at his own people.

Who is a good soldier? Only one to whom you can point out his father, his mother, or his brother in the crowd, saying, "those are enemies of society, kill them"—and who will obey.

I may remark here, in passing, that it occurred to me to refer to this idea in a conversation I had with the well-known French writer and thinker, Alexander Dumas, *fils*, and with what success? Conceding the justice of the apprehension, he had no other comforting suggestion to offer than to say: "Oh, yes, the soldier will shoot yet!"

The other defender of society, the priest, has been less ill-used than the soldier, and consequently he is not so tired of his task: but, on the other hand, people begin to tire of him, less heed is paid to his words, and there arises a doubt as to the truth of all that he preaches.

There was a time when it was possible to tell the people that there is but one sun in the heavens as there is but one God-appointed king in the country. As stars of the first, second, third and fourth magnitude are grouping themselves around the sun, so the powerful, the rich, the poor, and the miserable, surround the king on earth. And, as all that appeared plausible, people used to believe that such arrangements are as they ought to be. All was accepted, all went on smoothly: none of such things can be advanced nowadays, however; no one will be ready to believe in them.

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Clearly, things assume a serious aspect: Suppose the day comes when the priests will entirely lose their hold on the people, when the soldiers will turn their guns muzzles down—where will society look for bulwarks then? Is it possible that it has no more reliable defense?

Certainly, it has such a defense, and it is nothing else but *talents*, and their representatives, in science, literature, and art in all its ramifications.

Art must and will defend society. Its influence is less apparent and palpable, but it is very great; it

might even be said that its influence over the minds, the hearts, and the actions of people, is enormous, unsurpassed, unrivaled. Art must and will defend society with all the more care and earnestness, because its devotees know that the "regulators" are not disposed to give them the honorable, respectable position they occupy now—since, according to them, a good pair of boots is more useful than a good picture, a novel, or a statue. Those people declare that talent is luxury; that talent is aristocratic, and that, consequently, talent has to be brought down from its pedestal to the common level—a principle to which we shall never submit.

Let us not deceive ourselves: there will arise new talents, which will gradually adapt themselves to new conditions, if such will prevail, and their works may perhaps gain from it, but we shall not agree to the principle of general demolition and reconstruction, when such have no other foundation but the well known thesis: "Let us destroy everything and clear the ground; as to the reconstruction—about that we shall see later on." We shall defend and advocate the improvement of the existing things by means of peaceful and gradual measures.

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It goes without the saying that we demand that society, on its side, should help us to fulfill our task: that it should trust us, give us all the freedom necessary for the development and exertion of talents.

There is the rub!

Well-fed, self-satisfied society quails at every change, at every blame, derision and comment; it distrusts the foremost, daring representatives of science, literature and art. Society strives jealously to retain the right not only to point out the road for talent, but even to regulate the measure, the degree of its development and its manifestation.

In this society of ours anything that is common and conventional is shielded by all kinds of rights and privileges, while anything that is new and original is bound to awaken animosity and censure, has to go through a severe struggle under the pressure of wide-spread cant and hypocrisy.

Try to create anything ingenious in any of the regions of science and literature, try to present in graphic or plastic form the most original, striking conception, but only forget or refuse to surround it with the conventional layer of triviality and vulgarity so dear to the heart of society, you will be done for, you will not even obtain a hearing, you will be called a charlatan, if nothing worse than that.

Why is that so? Was it society that has shown the way to all great discoveries? No, it has always detained them, has always put breaks on them.

Has society, in its collective form, ever evoked any of the great manifestations of art or literature? No; society was always eager to worry, to persecute men of talent, though it was erecting monuments to them after their death.

How did society come to display such arrogance and presumption? It was tempted that way only by the unchristian conviction that "the aim justifies the means."

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Can there be anything more exasperating than the conversations we hear sometimes:

"Have you been at the 'Salon?'"

"No, we did not happen to go there this year, but last year we were there more than once."

There is irony here as well as truth, since, in the majority of cases, you will find in the "Salon" the same number of pictures nearly of the same quality, treating on nearly the same subjects, and, most assuredly, painted nearly in the same style.

"Have you seen the new play of Sardou?"

"Just imagine, could not possibly get to see it yet, had to go to the country; but then to-morrow we go to the *Comedie Française* to see that new thing of *Dumas*. They say both plays are very much alike in their conception, as well as in their plot." And this is perfectly true; they are doubtlessly more or less alike.

Whose fault is this then, if not the authors'?

No. Ask the playwrights whether they would dare to represent the action in such a way as it has been suggested to them by real life, with its logical conclusion, made unavoidable by the march of events, omitting, for once, the long established, hackneyed, conventional termination?

"No," the authors would tell you, "such a thing is not to be thought of," and they will be in the right. Society, weighed down by cant, will not go to see such a play, however interesting it may be; so the author has to humor the public if he does not want to bring ruin on his manager and on himself.

The same is the case with artists, sculptors, even composers. What a great number of favorites of the Muses have been driven into early graves by the animosity of the public to all new construction of poetical as well as musical ideas!

On one side we hear complaints of the dullness, the monotony, even the triviality prevailing in art; people clamor for something inspired, something original; on the other side, the same public arbitrarily chastises you for all that fails to come within the range of the established, conventional ideas!

It is high time, it seems to me, to understand the necessity of treating art with tolerance and confidence, if we want it to fraternize with society, to become as one with it, to serve it faithfully and well in the present troubled times when the poet and the artist are soldiers on their posts.

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"But look here you, representative of art," I might be asked, "what are the tidings that you are so eager to announce to us—what are your discoveries that would be so entirely new to society?"

Well, what we should say would, perhaps, not be

news, yet certainly the idea of it has not yet penetrated the consciousness of the people. Armed with the rich, varied resources of art we will tell people some truths.

"Give up," we shall say to them, "give up enjoying yourselves amidst the illusions of the idealism which lulls your senses, of the idealism of high-sounding words and phrases. Look around you through the eye of sensible realism, and you will acquire the certitude of your mistake. You are not the Christians you assume yourselves to be. You are not representatives of Christian societies, of Christian countries."

Those that kill their kind by the hundred thousand are no Christians.

Those that are always moved, in private as well as in public life, by the principle of "eye for eye, and tooth for tooth," are no Christians.

Those that spend many hours of their lives in churches, yet who give nothing, or next to nothing, to the poor, are no Christians.

What have you done with the decree of the Saviour concerning Christian humility and to help such as are in real need?

What is the stand taken now, let us ask, by those two great branches of the administration of Christ's Church, that call themselves the Roman Catholic and the Orthodox churches, which have once separated, thanks to their inability to agree as to whether the Holy Ghost proceeded from the Father

and the Son or from the Father alone? Is it possible that they have not come yet to an understanding, and, blinded by mutual hatred, are neglecting the loftiness of their mission on earth?

What is the stand taken by those new churches originated of late, comparatively speaking, on the plea of a more realistic understanding of the connection of life with its Originator? Is it possible that, having concluded the fight with their great adversary, those churches have also drifted into a sweet nap over the existing order of things, and have also renounced taking a hand in any further reforms?

Well, if it be so, let men of talent shake the strong and the powerful out of the somnolence into which they have fallen; a difficult task it will be, but a noble one. And if, we are refused a hearing, or attempts are made to muzzle us, why, the worse it will be for society. Rouse itself it shall; but it will be too late—the “Vandals will have burned Rome” once again. We may be assured that no churches, no bankers’ offices will then be spared.

“If any man have ears to hear, let him hear.”



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